[W. L. Dobbs]

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Pioneer [?]

Phipps, Woody

Rangelore,

Tarrant Co., Dist. 7

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[W.L. (Bill) Dobbs, 68?], was born on his father's stock farm in Fannin co., Tex., June 21, 1875. When Bill was three years old, his father moved his stock and family from Fannin co., to [Stephens co?]., Tex, where he formed a partnership with Bill's two uncles, George and Henry Black, owners of the famous Muleshoe Ranch. Bill grew up on the Muleshoe Ranch, was taught to ride horses at four and helped work with the cattle at five years of age. He worked in the roundups before he was 12, and was employed as a cowboy on the [?] Ranch in [?] co., when he was 14. He was employed on the [?] Ranch in the Texas Panhandle when he was 15, but returned to the Muleshoe Ranch the following year, where he was employed as a cowboy until he retired in 1935. His story:

“Did you say, 'did I ever ride a wild one?' Why, son, I've rode 'em in my time that none of these dudes here at the rodeo could touch with a 10 foot sapling! Sure, I've rode 'em! Why, when I was just a young fellow, we all had to go out and catch 'em wild, right where they growed, and tame 'em on the spot. I practically spent my life in the saddle, and out on the open range where it takes a man to stay on the payroll. You bet! I wasn't born on the range, though. I was born June 21, 1875, on my dad's stock farm in Fannin county, but

was raised on the famous Muleshoe outfit in Stephens county, my dad moving everything we had out there when I was three years old.

“That's the reason I can't tell you about Fannin county, and where I was born, but I can tell you a-plenty about the Muleshoe, where I was raised. For one thing, I rode hosses when I was too little even to climb up by the stirrups, but had to have some cowpoke to give me a boost so's I could get into the saddle. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 All the cowpokes were right anxious to learn me to ride, so I got teaching a-plenty, and by the best riders in the business them days, because the Muleshoe had too many cattle to just have a few greenhorns messing around. My Uncle, Henry Black, run over 2,000 head in the 'Upside Down Horseshoe', made like this: . My dad, John Dobbs, ran over 1,000 in the 'Right Sideways Muleshoe', made like this: . My Uncle, George Black, run around 1,500 in the 'Left Sideways Muleshoe', made like this: . And later on, there were other Muleshoe brands, as others in the family got a few head. Oh, there was a whole mess of them for awhile there. My dad died about 30 years ago, and my mother married Amos Atkins, who ran the 'Rail A', made like this: . He owned about 30,000 acres in his 'Rail A' spread in Kent county. He still owns that place, but I never did know just how many head of cattle he ran on it. He finally leased all of the Muleshoe outfit, and runs it today. I worked for him myself up 'til 1935, when I quit to take it easy. Not that I couldn't take it, but I've saved my money, married a good woman, and we just intend to take it easy for awhile.

“Now, I'll get back to myself. Why, I said [?] learned to ride before I could even climb up on a broom-tail. Well, sometime before I was even five years old. I'd go out with old George Benson, the wagon boss, when he went out to the herd where the boys were working. I'd ride around here and there, then, while the boys were eating their dinner or supper, I'd ride herd on the cattle. Yep, rode herd when I wasn't but five years old. 3 “Now, I can't give you an exact line-up on just when I roped my first calf and so on; but between five and 12, I was taught to work with cattle just like the rest of the waddies on the place. And when I was 12, I thought I knowed a heap more than they'd ever learn if they stayed in the business 'til they had chin whiskers to their knees. And, for a fact, I could ride and rope

with the most of them, because I stays at it as long's I could see. Main reason for that, I suppose, was because I loved to ride a hoss and work cattle. I was really in my glory if a hoss pitched with me, or if I had some trouble with a dogie. Just anything that could happen was apple pie for me because I always wanted to show what I could do, if not to the others, to the critters themselves anyway. From what they say, I reckon I was pretty hard on the stock, but I got a lotta work done.

“My first stay away from home was when I was about 12, or maybe a little less. I stayed out on the regular roundup for three months. You know, where there's a lot of cattle on a ranch, the critters will drift. We'd have to go into four and five counties to roundup the Muleshoe stock. [?] around the ranch and on other ranches. In that roundup, I slept just like the regular hands. Used my saddle for a pillow and my saddle blanket for a mattress. However, I had a good bed roll to go over that saddle blanket. Any man that there was anything to always had him a good bed roll. The regular way we slept out like that would be to find a small rise and throw the flop right on top of it. Then we'd take a stick or something, our boots if necessary, and drag little ditches down away from our bed, so's if it rained the 4 water'd wash away from us and not get us all wet. Of course, we throwed a tarp over the bed after we got it made, and that was just like sleeping in a tent.

“While I was still just a young fellow, the plains had a lot of buffalo chips around, and when we couldn't find sticks to build a fire, we'd use them chips. Nowadays, the chuck wagon totes a gasoline stove, and the cooky can set up and have a meal in the same time as a woman can where they have natural gas.

“I always wanted to be around the gang when meal time came, because they'd get to talking about old times, and telling tales on one another. A lot of kidding went on, too, and I always liked that. Many a time I've heard my uncles talk about Indian raids when they first came to Fannin county, and other tales about rustlers, and so on, but I'll have to skip that because don't remember the important things about them. I'll just say that the oldtimers

had an awful hard time when they first settled here, and had to put up with things you and me wouldn't put up with a-tall.

“One of the things that has changed since they first came out there is the hoss business. We used to, when I was a kid, go out and trap wild hosses right/ out on the range. There wasn't any fences then, anywhere, and the hosses ran wild everywhere. Old Mustangs that never tamed down like the hosses of today. You'd have to break them all over every morning when you caught them up. While they weren't as wild as they were when they were first caught, they were rascals. They'd pitch and snort around for 10 or 15 minutes every morning, and it'd be a small rodeo to be 5 around if you weren't used to seeing it all the time. The only difference was when a new hand was trying one out. The boys try to slip him a salty one, and he'd try to stay with it just to show his mustard. On most of the West Texas ranches of that day, they didn't hire you if you couldn't ride the saltiest they had the first time you tried out.

“I know that was the way they tried me out when I left the Muleshoe to try for a berth on the ULA's in [?] county. It was owned by Jim Witherspoon, who ran it. I can't, for the life of me, recall the number of head he ran, but it was way up in the thousands. 'ULA' was his brand for the stock, though, and Tom Benson was the wagon boss. I worked there during the Spring and Fall roundups, then left for the [?].

“The [?] spread was so big I reckon it took in eight counties, and was cut up into about eight divisions. Each division took in a county. I couldn't call off the names of the counties, but I'd be safe in saying the [?] was in the Panhandle. I worked in the fifth division, and a fellow by the name of Hayden was the ramrod. Thomas Smith was the wagon boss, and a better rider and pistol shot never lived than old Tom. Just give him a glimpse on what you wanted drilled, turn him around two or three times, and he could turn right to it, and drill it plum center. He was so good he was a wizard with a six-shooter-a wizard for sure!

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“I don't reckon any hands ever knowed just how many head the [?] ran. There were ways and ways you could figure out a tally, but it was just impossible to go in there and round up all the 6 cattle because there were about 50,000 head in our division, alone. Yes, 50,000; and there were eight divisions. I was on the spread a whole year, and seen new cowpunchers right along that had worked there for a long time. I know for a fact that I never seen anything like a third of the cowpunchers on that spread.

“I was back at the Muleshoe for the next Spring roundup, after my year on the [?]. Glad to get back, too, because they put me on the payroll. That was the reason I left in the first place, because I wasn't drawing money, and I was doing the work the top hands done. I don't recollect the salary I drawed when I come back, but all in all, salary being gauged by the beef prices, I've drawed from $10.00 a month to $160.00 a month. You see, there'd been times, and recently too, that the price of beef wasn't as much as it cost to ship it somewhere to sell it. Of course, when the cattlemen lost money just on shipping beef, they naturally didn't ship it, and when they didn't have any money coming in, they tried not to let too much of it go out at a time.

“I don't mean to let you think the cowmen didn't have the guts. They had the guts to do anything. My Uncle George Black, I seen him get in the way of a speckled, blue roan bull, that was mad and trying to catch somebody. If that bull'd caught him, he'd have gored him for good, and left him for dead. Now, anybody that's ever had much to do with cattle, know [?] that when a critter is coming at you, if you'll fall on the ground and roll towards it, it'll jump over you and you can get away. 7 Uncle George fell and rolled towards the bull, but the bull didn't jump. Instead, he started pawing the ground. Quicker'n the eye could follow the move, he jerked his six-shooter out and pumped five shots in that bull's belly before you could say 'Jack Robinson'. The bull sorta shook his head, walked to his left for about 10 feet, then dropped over dead. Many an old-timer will remember this when they see it, and I know Uncle George has told lots of them that didn't see it, because he was so well known that lots of them asked him about it. It was a good show, alright.

“That's something about the range. There's always something happening that puts on a show. Ol' Nigger Cal was a good a rider as ever you'd see, and he was throwed by a hoss he rode every day for several years. It was this way: Early one morning, when all the cowpunchers were out roping their hosses and saddling them, Nigger Cal had his roped and saddled before the most of them had theirs. His hoss was a-standing by the corral fence, and another hoss bucked over to where they were. Nigger Cal's hoss bucked right straight up, and Cal lit on top of that eight foot corral fence. After he lit, he rolled off into the corral where the other hosses were trying to get away from the ropes, and darn nigh got killed before he could climb that fence and make his get-a-way.

“Now, I'll tell you one on myself. That same mare, a cutting hoss and a good one at that, hadn't been used for a couple of weeks before the Spring roundup one year, and was a little stale. I expected to have to let her buck for awhile, and was working with the saddle when she jumped around and kicked me right between the 8 shoulder blades. Now, it/ probably couldn't happen again in a hundred years, but she kicked me in such a way that I went almost straight up and lit in the limbs of a [mosquite?] tree. I was scratched up quite a bit and went around all humped for a couple of weeks, before I got the kinks out of me again.

“There's one more thing, then I'm through. I made a lot of drives, but never made a drive like the first big drive I made. Just before I went to the [?], my Uncle Henry decided to drive 5,000 head over into the Territory (now Okla.) one Spring, on account of the grass shortage. The grass was good over there, and we started out. [Well?], I'd never seen any Indians to speak of, and just after we got over the line there, somewhere north of where Vernon is now, our herd ran right through an Indian village, and it was [??] to boot. Well, the first thing I knowed about it was when I rode right up to an Indian tepee (you know, they all lived in tepees in them days) and I saw about 15 Indians in that bunch. I didn't know whether to run, shoot, or just go straight up. They didn't say anything, either, but just stared. I can't make you feel the way I felt then, and I just know that you couldn't have

bent my hair any way because it must have been straight up and stiff as a board. One of the Muleshoe oldtimers, old Bill [?] (and he lives right here in Fort Worth now), he rode up behind me and said something to them in Indian. They never smiled, but grunted, and everything seemed to be alright. I never did get over my scare, though, and was ready to ride at the drop of a hat. Not towards them redskins, either.

“Then, to top it all off, about 20 Indians, [?] Parker in 9 the bunch, came over to the chuck wagon and had dinner with us. The men folks joked around, and after quite a bit of talk, we went on our way.

“Stampedes? I've been in a hundred, I guess. You're bound to have stampedes any time you've got a herd gathered up. Not every time, but a lot of times you will. You see, they'll run at the least little scare. Why, a saddle can make a noise, a rabbit can jump up and run, a skunk can show up, or any little old thing can happen, and they're off like a shot out of a gun.

“Any time it rains, whether it's midnight or spang up noon, the herd will be a little skittish. Then, those electric storms, for which West Texas is noted, they make the herd's stomp. I can't say as I blame the cattle because the heat of their bodies draws the lightning bolts right down to them. Why, one time I seen an electric storm in daytime, when we had around 1,500 head in a herd about four or five miles west of Crowell, and the bolts just skipped around over the herd, knocking four or five out, and then three of them were killed. That same time, one of the cowpunchers riding herd on that bunch was knocked clean off his hoss and unconscious, by a bolt. It was a wonder he wasn't killed because another cowpoke riding herd on another herd about the same distance east of Crowell was killed on the same day and in the same way. Those electric storms are something to be reckoned with, and yet, you couldn't hardly ride off and leave the herd to itself.

“Now, about the first barb wire fence I ever saw: My Uncle Henry fenced a hoss pasture in Stephens county, and lots of people hollered about that because they didn't want any

fence 10 in the country. You know, they kept the Swenson and Campbell fences cut for 10 years out there before they could get one to stay up. The ranchers just didn't want any fence in the country, and felt that fences would ruin every cattleman.

“I'm just in to see the fine cattle here in the Stock Show right now. I don't live here, but still live in the old Muleshoe. I saved my money while I worked, at least the last years I did and that's what we're living on now.